DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 060 666 EM 009 733

AUTHOR Johnson, Nicholas
TITLE Children's Television Violence; Statement Before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications of the Senate Commerce Committee.
INSTITUTION Federal Communications Commission, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 22 Mar 72
NOTE 7p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Broadcast Industry; Business Responsibility; *Children; *Commercial Television; *Social Behavior; Speeches

ABSTRACT

The staff of the Surgeon General's report on Television and Social Behavior has given us five volumes of reports documenting television's adverse impact on our children's mental health. Action for Children's Television has pointed out what television executives are doing to make our children into little consumers. These are but small instances in a whole pattern of totally irresponsible corporate behavior, and they can only be understood and dealt with in that context. Some proposals to remedy this situation include: 1) fund the Public Broadcasting Corporation at no less than $500 million a year; 2) require that the three commercial networks provide one-third of all prime time on a nonsponsored basis for entertainment, dramas, cultural, and public affairs programming; 3) require counter advertising; 4) require that two commercial minutes be removed from every half hour containing violence, and be made available at no cost to professionals so they can provide information about the adverse effects of violence; 5) reduce the permissible number of commercial minutes; 6) require all commercials to be bunched on the hour and half-hour; 7) forbid networks to own programs, program production facilities, or situations; and 8) fund a review of the impact of television upon all aspects of our society. (SH)

ED 060666

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Statement of FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson
Before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications
of the Senate Commerce Committee, March 22, 1972

Children's Television Violence

The broadcasting industry now stands charged with having molested the minds of our nation's children to serve the cause of corporate profit.

Executives, whom one would assume to be rich beyond their wildest dreams of avarice, each year seek even more in salaries, expense accounts and stock options. They found they could become richer still if they would only take a whole nation of children and train them to be more violent. Accordingly, they set about doing it.

Senator Dodd first indicted television's implication in violence--what we then called "juvenile delinquency"--18 years ago, back in 1954. Network executives promised they would do something about it--a study. In 1961 they had to confess they never even did the study. Meanwhile, levels of violence on television had increased. In 1968, after the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, President Johnson established the Eisenhower Commission to study violence in our society. Once again an indictment of television. Once again promises of reform. And once again the studies showed the incidents of violence on television remained unchanged, or actually increased, following these hollow expressions of concern.

EM 009 733

Isn't it time we face these ugly facts? Isn't it time we express the outrage and frustration that is felt by almost every American parent?

The networks are benefitting from a common failing of our society. We condemn particular instances of what we ignore--or even reward--in the mass.

A man who kills one other man will be tried for murder. But a President who has presided over the death of 422,000 persons in Southeast Asia (according to his own count) can seriously undertake a campaign for reelection as a man of peace.

A Presidential assistant was dismissed by President Eisenhower because he had accepted a vicuna coat from a businessman dealing with the government. But when ITT is charged with giving $400,000 to President Nixon's campaign, the men who were involved in permitting that conglomerate corporation to get antitrust approval to acquire another billion-dollar corporation end up as an Attorney General designate, the President's campaign manager, a U. S. District Court Judge, and a Presidential assistant.

A man who steals $2.00 from a coin phone box will be sent to jail. But a telephone executive who can get an unwarranted rate increase that permits him to take an additional $2.00, every month, from every telephone, can steal hundreds of millions of dollars from the American people and be sent, instead, to the White House for dinner.

Out where I live, if you pollute the air by burning a few leaves at the curb you are fined. And yet General Motors, which provides the lion's share of all the air pollution in America gets encouragement from the government in the form of anticompetitive trade restrictions and inequitable tax relief to enable it to make the pollution problem even worse.

And so it is with child molesters. If you do it during the week, on the school playground, to one child, you are driven off to prison in a police car. But if you do it Saturday morning, in the living room, to millions of young children, you are just driven home, by a chauffeur, in a long black limousine.

Action for Childrens Television has pointed out what television executives are doing to make our children into little consumers.

Robert Choate has testified to what they are doing to teach our children nutritional habits that are very dangerous to their physical health.

And now the staff of the Surgeon General's report (notwithstanding the Administration's invitation to let the networks stack the panel itself) has given you five volumes of reports documenting television's adverse impact upon our children's mental health.

As everyone but network executives has known all along, violence in television programs leads to violence in children's behavior. I reviewed some 75 to 100 studies to this effect

before testifying before the Eisenhower Commission in 1968. What we have not formerly been able to document is that it also may be a cause of violence many years later. And, as you now know, the studies also report a direct correlation between the quantity of television watching generally and low IQ, poor grades, lack of leadership ability, inability to socialize with other children, and a psychopathic tendency to withdraw from reality. Nor is parental supervision adequate; the staff studies show that forbidding children to watch violence on television can also lead to adverse psychological consequences.

Not that adults come off any better, mind you. Corporate television is unprejudiced in the disrespect for its audience; it will mistreat any viewer, without regard to age, race or sex.

We have had a Presidential Commission that indicted television for its adverse impact upon race relations--the Kerner Commission. I already mentioned the Presidential Commission headed by Milton Eisenhower that issued two staff volumes on the impact of television programming on violence generally. Virtually every minority group in America has complained of its portrayal on television. The women's liberation groups make some very persuasive arguments about the demeaning impact of television on women. Parents and teachers are outraged. Many religious leaders have decried the impact of television on our moral and spiritual values as a nation. Nor is this the fault of the writers. Writers and producers recently testified here

before Senator Ervin that the creative, constructive material they do try to put in television programs gets censored out by network executives. Over 80 percent of them had personally experienced corporate censorship.

No, training our children to be violent--as immoral as it is--is but a small ingredient in a whole pattern of totally irresponsible corporate behavior. The problem of violence in children's television programs can only be understood, and dealt with, in that context.

And now, like the child who finally shouted what his elders could not bring themselves to whisper--"the emperor has no clothes"--I think it's time we in Washington say out loud the truth that all of us read in our mail from Americans in all walks of life: the men who are currently running commercial network television in this country are a vicious, evil influence.

I have been writing books and articles and making proposals to deal with these problems for the five-and-one-half years I have been on the Commission. I will not bore you with a full repetition of all of them--many of which have already been laid before you in testimony in past years. But here are a few, and perhaps some new ones.

1. Fund the Public Broadcasting Corporation at no less than $500 million a year. We need a strong public broadcasting service more than any other nation in the world to counteract commercial broadcasting, and yet we fund our modest efforts at

a lower proportion of our gross national product than virtually any other civilized nation. "Sesame Street" cost significantly less than one-half of one percent of commercial broadcasting's annual revenue--and even that pittance didn't come from the networks.

2. Require that the three commercial networks provide one-third of all prime time on a non-sponsored basis for entertainment, dramas, cultural and public affairs programming. On a staggered basis, this would give every American a choice of programming during any prime time viewing hour throughout the week. Significant quantities of children's programs without commercials--the problem addressed by ACT--are also needed.

3. Require counter advertising, as the Federal Trade Commission has courageously proposed to a reluctant Federal Communications Commission. No products would be banned--not even the drug pushing to which corporate broadcasting seems so profitably addicted--but the viewer would at least be exposed to a little bit of truth from time to time to support his own efforts at self defense.

4. As for violence, simply require that two commercial minutes be removed from every half hour containing violence, and be made available at no cost to responsible professionals to program information to children (and adults) about the adverse consequences of violence, the alternative approaches to resolving

human conflict, or other balancing information thought by the professionals to be appropriate.

5. Reduce the permissible number of commercial minutes (a standard now set by the industry, not the FCC) to one-half of current levels.

6. Require all commercials to be bunched on the hour and half-hour.

7. Forbid networks to own programs, program production facilities, or stations. This long-overdue divestiture would merely bring the broadcasting industry into compliance with the antitrust standards conventionally applied to the film industry.

8. Finally, fund the long-overdue across-the-board review of the impact of television upon all aspects of our society--before we face yet another national crisis, and Presidential Commission or Congressional committee inquiry. Needless to say, this time insure that the broad range of professionals necessary to such an undertaking are fully independent and have no conflict of interest with the networks' interests.

America will long remember how you--and we--respond in this hour of national need to the pressure of the most powerful lobby in our nation's history. I have seen little hope during my years on the FCC that establishment power is prepared to undertake the kind of reforms I have proposed today. Won't you please prove me wrong?